

GATEWAY CHURCH NORTHUMBERLAND

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Jesus said “I am the resurrection and the life” Part 5

This is the fifth and final part of “I am the resurrection and the life” in the ‘Jesus said “I am”’ series.

Its about crowns and rewards.

Crowns:

A crown is a symbol authority. It signifies that whoever is wearing it has royal authority to rule.

It denotes honour and glory and a high position – it elevates the wearer.

It is out of the ordinary and should only be bestowed by someone with authority.

So why talk about crowns – because the bible does and its good news.

We will receive crowns:

These crowns do different things -

PS 103:4 (the Lord) redeems your life from the pit
and crowns you with love and compassion,

Our lives are lifted up – elevated – from the pit. We then wear love and compassion – we receive it but also we have the power and authority to give it out.

PS 149:4 For the LORD takes delight in his people;
he crowns the humble with salvation.

God particularly likes people who are humble. They don't put themselves higher than others. But they are given the gift of salvation as a crown. Therefore they are lifted up by the one who has the authority to do it – because they don't do it themselves.

And these crowns last and are not taken back – the crowns of love, compassion and salvation – they are an eternal prize. Paul uses the analogy of organised games – like the Olympics:

^{1CO 9:25} Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.

^{2TI 2:5} Similarly, if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not receive the victor's crown unless he competes according to the rules.

Note that we need to be in it to win it. The rules are that the faith we have, is shown to be a genuine saving faith by our actions. Our lives should show the fruit of the faith we profess and that is how to win the crown.

And the crown lasts forever – it's not like the FA cup which has to be given back every year – its more like an Olympic gold medal.

In this picture of a race – we are not competing against others – we are running the race of life and winning against the things that would come against us and deflect us. So it's more like a long hurdles race or even an assault course at times.

^{2TI 4:7} I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸ Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day--and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

But the promise is that if we run it properly – we will get the crown of salvation and righteousness. We will be right with God – we will have got it right – and there will be nothing to fear from judgement.

^{JAS 1:12} Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.

So when life is hard – and it can be as we all know – remember:

We are in a race with a big reward – eternal life with God. There is nothing better to live for is there?

There is another sort of crown –

Paul rejoices in having played his part in the salvation of the people who are now his brothers. He is joyful in his ongoing relationship with them.

^{PHP 4:1} Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown.....

¹TH 2:19 For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? ²⁰ Indeed, you are our glory and joy.

When we play a part in bringing people to Jesus – when we are the gateway to the gate – we can rejoice and even glory in that.

When we function as a church together and encourage and build each other up – that is like receiving crowns of glory.

It means something. It is recognised – it makes a difference. That is something we can really “glory” in and be joyful about.

Crowns for elders:

There is special mention of elders with regards to crowns -

¹PE 5:1 To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: ² Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers--not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; ³ not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. ⁴ And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.

Note – it doesn't say they will have better crowns than everyone else! I believe Peter wanted to encourage elders in particular, as leaders in general can be susceptible to all sorts of attack as the enemy does not want the church to be led properly.

We have all seen examples of leaders falling by the wayside. They didn't run the race by the rules and didn't fix their eyes on the prize. We mustn't fall into those traps.

In Revelation we read about 24 special elders -

REV 4:4 Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads.

REV 4:10.... the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne....

I don't think we can understand fully what is happening here. But note that it's these elders who “cast their crowns before him” – recognizing that all crowns and earthly authority are nothing compared to God and his authority and power and majesty.

Crowns of Jesus:

Jesus allowed his majesty and kingly authority to be cruelly mocked by a different crown -

MK 15:17 They put a purple robe on him, then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on him.

But in the end – He wins!

REV 14:14 I looked, and there before me was a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was one "like a son of man" with a crown of gold on his head

What about rewards?

We have already seen that the basic reward we get if we run the race and keep going is a crown. That's not so basic is it – salvation, eternal life, love, compassion and joy!

But are there extra rewards as well?

EPH 6:7 Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, ⁸ because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free.

COL 3:23 Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, ²⁴ since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

1CO 3:11 For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹² If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, ¹³ his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. ¹⁴ If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. ¹⁵ If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.

So there is a picture here about working for God in a wholehearted way – and not being concerned about what people think or what they see you doing.

It is God who matters – not the approval or admiration of men. It is him we are serving ultimately. You remember the sheep and goats – both sets of people didn't realise they were interacting with Jesus when they helped the poor or needy (or didn't help them).

And the quality of the work needs to be good and stand testing by the fire of the holiness of God. Otherwise – we will "suffer loss".

Now I don't know what this is – it's probably in the "mystery" category - but I would rather not suffer loss!

Jesus encourages to fix our eyes on a different reward:

MT 6:19 "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

1TI 6:17 Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. ¹⁸ Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. ¹⁹ In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.

Here Jesus contrasted earthly wealth with heavenly wealth— that is spiritual treasure. One is seen – the other is promised. One will soon pass away - the other will never pass away. One is not worth making the foundation of your life, the other provides foundations for eternity.

It isn't a quantifiable treasure in heaven – we already have our crowns. It is the contrast between what we put our hope in and serve with our lives that counts here.

And Jesus brings the reward:

REV 22:12 "Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. ¹³ I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.

This brings us back full circle to Jesus being the resurrection and the life:

JN 11:25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; ²⁶ and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.

There will be crowns for all who run the race to the end. The reward is eternal life with God in the New Jerusalem on the new earth.

There is nothing wrong with fixing our eyes on these things –

HEB 12:1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. ² Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

Remember Jesus ran the race first – he is cheering us on with thousands of others who have run it before us. The prize is waiting!